

Patience by moonflowers

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Summary:

Billy Hargrove was not fucking sweet. He was an asshole, a dick, a jerk, irresponsible, fucking crazy, take your pick. One thing he most definitely was not, was sweet.

Patience

Author's Note:

Fic number four, and I'm still at it with the song titles. This time it's from Guns N Roses' Patience. It came out in '88, but we'll ignore that. I'm so mad, I really thought I was done with my eighties rock phase ten years ago, but no, Billy fucking Hargrove has dragged me right back into it, the little bitch.

There's a moment in one of my other fics (part one of this series) where Steve calls Billy 'sweet' and he's like excuse me WHAT? and I wanted to play around with that a little more. It can loosely fit after that fic if you want but you definitely don't have to have read it to read this. Shout out to @suicidejane for suggesting it in the comments, this got totally out of hand, so thanks for that haa.

It took Billy longer than it should have for him to figure out why he was freaking out over something so small. Why after he'd forgotten all about it for a while, he'd slap his hand hard on the table or impulsively break whatever he happened to be holding when it hit him again. Okay, that was a fucking lie. He knew exactly why he was freaking out over it so much, it just took him a while to admit it. He and Steve weren't just friends anymore. And they weren't just fucking either. They were fucking and there were *feelings*, feelings a hell of a lot more than 'just friends' or 'the guy I'm fooling around with.' And while most of the time he could sort of handle it, told himself it was no big deal or he actually even felt good about the way things were, there was still the odd moment where it caught him off guard. A prime example of such a time being a couple of weeks back when Steve had called him sweet while they were fucking about in his bed. He'd been affronted by it at the time too, but he'd had Steve's dick in his hand and more pressing things to worry about.

But one thing he was certain of was this: Billy Hargrove was not fucking sweet. He was an asshole, a dick, a jerk, irresponsible, fucking crazy, take your pick. One thing he most definitely was not,

was sweet.

#

"Here you go, boys."

"Thanks, Brenda."

"Now you just holler if there's anything else I can get for you."

"Will do."

Billy had ordered for them at the diner. Strawberry ice cream for them both, even though he knew full well Steve preferred chocolate. He couldn't have said why he'd done it either, other than just to be a dickhead. But Steve didn't call him out on it, just said thanks, and plucked the little red cherry off the top of his dish and dropped it onto Billy's. And then he felt like a massive fucking jerk. Steve's knee was pressed between his under the table, he was wearing one of Steve's lame shirts because he'd got coffee on his that morning when they'd had breakfast in his fancy kitchen, and then he'd handed over that fucking cherry without either of them needing to say anything, because he didn't like them and knew that Billy did. Yeah, they were dating. He could deny it all he liked, but there it was. Another small freak out moment followed, and Billy tried not to smack the little bowl of sugar packets right off the table in frustration.

"So you really wanna go to this party, huh?" Steve said, already half way done with his ice cream. He looked tired, and not the 'I stayed up late and drank to much' kind of tired, nah, Billy knew that intimately well. It looked like the sort of tired that came from more than just lack of sleep, the sort that wore away at you day and night and sat heavy between your shoulders. He knew that one too.

"Yeah, I got a reputation to uphold, Harrington." He already knew Steve wasn't as interested in parties as he used to be, and honestly neither was Billy - if he couldn't get drunk and grope Steve in the middle of the front room like he would with a girl, show him off and suck face by the punch bowl, then what was the point? But still: reputation.

"Oh yeah?" Steve raised an eyebrow and smiled around another spoonful of ice cream.

"Yep." He lowered his voice. "And who knows, it might put me in a generous mood, if I get what I want. Might even suck your dick." Billy's gag reflex disappeared completely after a few beers. Steve was in for a fucking treat.

"Y'know what, I was going to say no, but that's just swung it for me," Steve said, looking smug as he leant back against the faded pink vinyl of the booth seat. The effect was ruined though, when he yawned.

Hating himself for how intimate a thought it was, Billy found himself wondering how much sleep he was getting. After sex, Steve was always out like a light, whether it be ten minutes or the whole night through, and though Billy could never drop off so easily, he was happy enough just to lie next to him a while, warm weight sprawled along his back. But he'd also noticed, the few times they'd managed to sleep the night through in the same bed, that Steve was a little twitchy when he slept at night. He was restless, huffed and tossed about a lot, sometimes woke with a sharp noise, breathing hard and looking about wildly before he calmed down and wrapped himself around Billy again like his life depended on it. From the way Steve kept rubbing at his eyes and holding back yawns, Billy would guess it happened when he wasn't there too.

"Are you this much of an asshole to everyone, or am I just lucky, pretty boy?" Honestly, he liked it when Steve was a bit of an asshole, chest out and pleased with himself, that old King Steve he'd heard so much about.

But Steve didn't answer, just gave him a smile Billy probably didn't deserve and went back to his ice cream. Billy squeezed his knee under the table.

Whenever they did something like this, they would inevitably get a few side glances from other kids from school. Nothing to set alarm bells a-ringing, they were just two guys at a diner for fuck's sake. But these kids had seen them at each other's throats in the halls or on the court, and couldn't seem to get it through their thick heads that the two of them hung out now. Billy just glared at them until they looked

away guiltily, back to their banana splits and ugly girlfriends and mind-numbing small talk.

He felt a kind of elation, a stupid, giddy happiness that he had this, had Steve. The noise of the diner faded to a dull thrum, the bustling waitresses and hyped-up kids unimportant, all of his attention on the boy sitting opposite him in the booth. It was enough to make him rush through the rest of his ice cream, even though it stung his teeth and made him feel a little sick, just so he could throw a couple bills down on the table and drag Steve back outside.

They were parked around the back, the lot mostly empty and hemmed in with trees and the greying back wall of the diner, thin sun of late afternoon not doing much to brighten things up.

"What the hell, man?" Steve said as Billy led him back to the car, though he was still smiling that dumb, lovely smile like Billy was the best thing since someone thought to put peanut butter and jelly on the same slice of bread. "I wasn't done."

"Yeah yeah," Billy said, and pulled him in for a kiss.

The first few times he'd kissed Steve, he'd been on the offensive. He'd pushed and shoved and bit and growled, bunched Steve's shirt up in his hand and hauled him up against the closest available surface. And Steve had pushed back, just as desperate and confused and wanting as he was. But this wasn't like that. He was holding Steve's face between his hands, tipping him gently back against the car as they kissed, slow soft presses of chilled lips and tongue still a little numb from the ice cream, Steve's mouth sweet and cold.

"Shit," Steve pulled away, flushed pink, surprised but pleased by the sudden show of affection, and rested his forehead against Billy's to catch his breath. "That was... yeah."

"Tell me about it."

"Mm."

"Come on," Billy drew himself away from the warmth of Steve pressed all along his front with reluctance, giving him a smack on the butt for good measure, "I gotta go get Max."

His soft, floaty bubble of happiness lasted the rest of the afternoon, after he'd dropped Steve back home and picked up Max, surprisingly even through the usual stilted family dinner. It wasn't until later that evening, as he lay in the darkness on his bed, listening to Max murmuring to her little weirdo friends over the radio, that the doubt started to creep in again.

Sweet. He wasn't sweet. There were moments when he could almost believe it; Steve's face in his hands and breath hitching, smiling against his lips and chasing the taste of ice cream on his tongue. But he wouldn't be able to keep it up forever. Sooner or later it would shatter and fall away completely, like every other time he'd tried to be better, and Steve would see the horrible fucking person left behind when the small and sparse niceties he could manage were stripped away. He threw his pillow across the room.

#

Steve was waiting for him outside the house, music already loud and the sound of people laughing and singing along pouring out of the open front door. "Hey," he said, with that soft little smile that by now Billy knew meant 'I'd kiss you hello if I could.' He looked tired again, eyes a little puffy and face pale. Although that could have just been the shitty lighting along the street, who knew. "You wanna head in?"

"Wait," Billy caught Steve just before he turned, voice low and quiet and filled with more concern than he'd planned on showing, "you okay?"

"I'm fine," Steve said, making an obvious effort to straighten up his shoulders and paste a smile on his face. Like Billy was going to buy that, Jesus. But if Harrington didn't want to talk about it, that was his problem. "Come on," he clapped a hand on Billy's shoulder to steer him towards the door, "let's go get a drink."

Billy did what Steve clearly wanted, and left it alone. It was easy enough, if he told himself enough times he didn't care. A few beers in though, and Steve was laughing along with the rest of them, popularity bolstered again now he was 'single' and hung out almost exclusively with Billy, and he'd mostly forgotten about it.

A couple of hours later, Billy was happily buzzed, and it was all fine. Just fine. Although every time someone who wasn't Steve spoke to him, he got a little more annoyed. When sober, he could usually dredge up the effort to try and ignore it, but now, not so much. He couldn't be fucking bothered. He didn't give two shits about any of these people. Often when he drank he just got *more* of everything - more sad, more angry, more likely to hit something, more wanting of an audience. Long story short, more of an asshole. This time, though he was still feeling all of that shit, he mostly just wanted to plaster himself all over Steve until everyone else got the message and fucked off. Steve was buzzed enough that he almost cried with laughter when Billy jabbed Tommy in the ribs while he was chugging a beer and it sprayed out of his nose, and Billy wanted to lick him.

When Steve went to use the bathroom, Billy followed.

"Hey honey," he said with a leer as he let himself into the bathroom, just as Steve was washing his hands.

"Cute," Steve rolled his eyes. "And that wasn't an invitation, I did actually have to pee."

"Yeah well," Billy locked the door behind him and crossed the bathroom - the suite was a horrible, sickly pink that needed ripping the fuck out in Billy's humble opinion - to cage Steve in against the sink. "I'm here now. Shame to waste an opportunity."

"God, you're - "

Billy was done fucking waiting by that point, after an evening of beer and being close but not able to touch leaving him impatient and irritated, and kissed him. They didn't bother with the niceties, too far gone for that, messy and wet and too much tongue, warm and beery. Steve was lax against him, pressed together chest to belly to hip to thigh, breathing hard through his nose as they pawed loosely at each other. Steve hummed in the back of his throat, deep and satisfied.

"I'm pretty sure someone promised to suck my dick later."

"Whoever it is, they're in for a fun time, Harrington. You have a great dick."

Steve snorted. "Thanks."

"You know what else I want?" Billy said, mouthing wetly at Steve's neck.

"What?" Steve tilted his neck for him, gripping at the sink behind him to keep balanced.

"You to fuck me."

They'd only done it maybe two or three times before, but it was one of the ways Billy liked it best; when he'd unwound after a beer or two, uncoiled, loose and pliant and it was easier for him to let Steve in, in every sense of the word. Loved the way every part of him felt heavy but comfortable like he was going to sink right through the sheets, the weight of Steve on top of him. The way he could draw Steve in close, one hand tugging at his hair and the other grasping a handful of his ass or his thigh as they rocked together.

"Mm," Steve said, brought one of Billy's hands to his face to kiss him palm. When he did, Billy's attention fell on the numerous little cuts scattered over his hands and up his forearms. He blinked to clear away the haze of beer, but they were still there. Billy was about to ask what the fuck that was about, but Steve beat him to the punch. "You're sweet when you're drunk."

Billy sighed, drawn out and exaggerated, and slumped all of his weight into Steve's arms. "Fuck off, Harrington." He couldn't deal with *that*, not now. "And I didn't hear a yes."

"Well," Steve ducked down to press more frustratingly gentle kisses to his lips, his jaw, "last time was pretty great..."

It had been - Billy on his front, chest pressed into Steve's mattress and hands curled tight into the sheets. Breathing hard, hot and damp on the pillow, biting his lip and probably drooling a bit. But he couldn't give a fuck when Steve was fucking him to within an inch of his life, long slow rolls of his hips getting shorter and more frantic, hands clasped around Billy's hips, whining and gasping loud enough to wake the whole goddamn town.

"Pretty great?" Billy snorted. "I think you mean fucking mind-blowing, sweetheart."

"Yeah, it was," Steve smiled, wide and happy, touched his nose to Billy's.

"Then the fuck are we waiting for?" Billy straightened up, gave Steve one last biting kiss, and took his hand to lead him out of the ugly bathroom. He was going to take all he could get before he had to give it up.

#

Billy chewed at his gum, blowing a big pink bubble that burst with a crack that echoed out over the quarry. Steve jumped at the sound, which gave him a kind of vicious satisfaction. He hadn't had the chance to buy more smokes, and he was stressed the fuck out, okay. Something to occupy his hands or mouth with helped him think straight - which had put a dopey smile on Steve's face for the entire afternoon the day he'd explained it. They'd swapped bubblegum flavoured kisses in the back seat of the Camaro for a solid half hour after that. He did it in school sometimes too; gum tasted better than the end of a pencil, and he could hardly light up in class.

"Something on your mind, big guy?"

"What?" Billy snapped. The two of them were parked up by the edge of the quarry, leaning on the hood of the car. Steve had driven, which would make for a hell of a long walk home for Billy after he did what he had to do, but he'd just have to deal with it.

"I was going to say you're looking real tense over there, but obviously I was wrong," Steve said dryly, and fuck, Billy really wasn't in the mood. "You're the picture of fucking calm."

"Maybe there is something, Harrington," Billy said, blowing another bubble.

"Yeah? Care to share with the group, *Hargrove*?" Billy only ever called Steve by his surname when he was joking around or flirting these days, and the sharp retreat back into the old Billy had apparently cut

Steve more than he'd thought. Good. It might help.

"Thing is, pretty boy," Billy said, trying to draw back into that hard, angry, bitter part of him that had been growing less with every day he'd woken up thinking *Steve*, a little rusty from lack of use but still very much there if he reached far enough, "you and me. You must have known it was never gunna last."

"Oh yeah?"

"Mhm," Billy chewed slowly on his gum, feeling Steve's eyes on him. "Or are you really that dumb you thought it could?" He couldn't help but look over at Steve then, though he knew it was fucking stupid. Steve was frowning, jaw tight and mouth downturned unhappily, though he mostly just looked disappointed. The moon was getting higher above the water, hitting his face and making every little angry line that bit sharper.

"I think the real question is - "

"*Steve?*" A crackling voice came from the trunk of Steve's car. "*Steve? Are you there?*"

"Is that Henderson?" Billy said, as Steve rushed around to the back of the car. "Wait, you have a radio in the back of your car?"

"Shit, shit," Steve was rummaging around in the trunk, flinging a jacket and a cracked Thermos to the ground in impatience.

"What the fuck, Harrington?" Billy wrinkled his nose as he continued to dig through the assorted junk. "And I thought the first time around was weird, Jesus..."

"Shut up Billy. Yes!" Steve grabbed the radio from behind a baseball bat, and - wait. The very same fucking bat full of nails that Max had threatened his balls with. The fuck? "I'm here Dustin."

"*Code Purple Steve, Code Purple!*"

"Okay cool," Steve nodded decisively. "Wait, that's emergency meeting, right?"

"No Steve!" came Henderson's exasperated shout through the radio, "No it is not, that's Code Orange. Purple, Steve, Purple! That means that demo - "

"Yeah okay I remember, Jesus," Steve shot a worried glance at Billy. "Code Purple is stragglers. I'm on it."

"You have to say over and - "

"Not the time Dustin!" Steve dropped the radio back into the trunk and turned to Billy. "I've gotta go."

"What?" Billy said. "No no, I think you misunderstand. We're going to - "

"Look, I know we've got some things we need to talk about baby, I know," Steve brought a hand up to rest on the side of Billy's neck, thumb stroking soft along his jaw, "but I really have to go, okay. You have to go home."

Billy laughed, low and without humour, taking Steve's wrist between his fingers and moving it aside. "Fuck no."

"What?" Steve blinked. "Billy, please, you have - "

"I don't have to do anything, Harrington," he spat. "We're fucking talking, now. I know I'm not fucking good enough for King Steve, but at least have the decency to listen."

"No, you listen," Steve said, "I think I know where you were going with that little speech just now, and let me tell you that's the most bullshit excuse to dump anyone I've ever heard baby. We can talk about it later, okay, but right now we really have to go - "

He stopped short, hand slack in Billy's grasp, as a twig snapped somewhere off to the left, followed by a weird, gurgling, clicking noise that made the hair on the back of Billy's neck stand up.

"Shit." Steve had gone still, wide-eyed and breathing hard - and not in the fun way Billy was used to. He was looking into the line of trees that fringed the side of the quarry as though something was about to jump out and eat him. "Jesus, this is the last thing I wanted to

happen, fuck." He tore away from Billy and dove back into the trunk of his car, grabbing that fucking bat and throwing a crowbar across to Billy.

"What the hell are you doing?" Billy said as he caught hold of the cold metal, hand stinging, wondering if Steve had actually lost his shit. "Why do I need - "

He didn't get to finish before the *things* came out of the trees. They were sort of dog-sized, hairless and scaly, slimy and fucking built, but their heads looked... just wrong. Their feet thudded on the ground as they bolted towards them, surrounding them, and one of them *opened their face*, peeling back like flower petals to reveal rows upon rows of needling little teeth.

"The fuck are those!?" he yelled, but raised the crowbar all the same, widening his stance ready to swing.

Steve didn't get a chance to answer before they got there. He took the first swing, bat straight to the fucked-up face of one of the dog things, a thud and a crack and a squeal and it was down. And alright, Billy always knew his boyfriend was a badass, but this was a whole other level. Steve span and raised his bat ready for the next one, black goop splattered on his face and up his arms, that *fire* in his eyes, and Billy gleefully jumped in right alongside him.

When it was done, a pile of the dead dog-things at their feet and Billy feeling that rushing elation that came with a good fight, he turned to Steve, wild grin on his face, only to see him kneeling on the cold ground, puffing out short pained breaths and holding his side.

"Shit," Billy threw the crowbar aside and ran to him, dropping heavily to his knees in the dirt, taking hold of his bloodied face and tilting it to look up at him. "Steve? Steve baby, are you with me?"

"Yeah, yeah I'm fine," Steve tried to stand, but winced and slumped back.

"No you're fucking not," Billy snapped back. The little cuts all over his face from where one of them had caught him with its teeth looked nasty, but they were shallow. They weren't what he was worried

about. Billy knew a rib injury when he saw one.

"I'm sorry," Steve managed to force out between teeth clenched in pain, eyes screwed shut.

"What the hell d'you have to be sorry about?"

"I didn't want to drag you into this shit," he winced as he tried to get to his feet again.

"Stop moving you idiot," Billy said, slipped an arm around him to help ease him up, "and stop apologising. Let me get you somewhere safe."

#

"The Byers'," Steve had mumbled once Billy'd shuffled him into the passenger seat of the BMW, "go to the Byers' place."

"What?" Billy said as he threw himself into the driver side. "Why?"

"S'closest," Steve said, eyes still shut against the pain, head tipped back as he sucked in sharp little breaths, "and I gotta tell Hop - "

"Alright, fine," Billy said, slamming the door shut. "Just do me a favour and sit still would you, Jesus."

It seemed to take an age to get anywhere, Steve ashen-faced and silent, Billy fighting the urge to drive as fast as he possibly could, not wanting to risk throwing Steve about more than he could help. Fuckin' shitty country roads, *shit*. His boyfriend. He'd thought of Steve as his boyfriend when they were fighting off those things. Something he hadn't done before. Kind of fucked up, considering he'd been attempting to dump his pretty ass moments before. He tried to concentrate on how much he liked the sound of it as they turned up the driveway. Mrs Byers must have heard them coming, because she was at the door before Billy could even drag Steve out of the car.

"Steve?" she called from the shadow of the porch, dim orange light from the house behind her, "is that you? Jonathan's not here, but I - "

"He's hurt," Billy said, before ducking to coax Steve back onto his

feet, "told me to bring him here."

"Shit," Mrs Byers gripped the rail across the porch, and Billy might have laughed if, y'know, this wasn't happening right now. "Okay sweetie, bring him inside, I'll get the kit."

Once he'd got Steve as comfortable as possible on the couch, mostly propped up against him, Mrs Byers bustled back in with an emergency first aid kit. "We all keep one close at hand, after last time," she said with a wry little uptick of a smile, and Billy wondered whether 'last time' meant when he'd smashed Steve's face in in that very room. The last time he'd been there, when he'd nearly killed the guy he was now holding to his chest, desperate to keep him whole and kiss his sore spots away, instead of being the one who put them there. Boyfriend. The entire evening was turning out to be one massive kick in the balls. Sure, he hadn't exactly been planning on it being fun, but this was... so, so messed up.

"What happened?" she said as she unzipped the kit.

"I uh, that is, we - " fuck, how was he meant to tell her about those, those things without sounding out of his damn mind?

"Demodogs," Steve managed to wheeze out, "Dustin radioed and said there were stragglers. Code... Code... fuck I don't remember the fucking colour."

"Purple," Billy said, "it was purple."

"Yeah," Steve nodded, "purple. They found us."

"You got em all?"

"Yeah."

"Good," she smiled tightly, turned to Billy. "Is he hurt anywhere else?"

"Pretty sure he's got bruised ribs, at the very least," Billy said darkly.

"Mrs Byers, I - "

"Joyce," she said, uncapping a bottle of antiseptic, "Joyce is fine, sweetie. I don't think we've...?"

"Billy Hargrove, ma'am."

"Oh." She looked puzzled, and after a minute of wondering why, he figured that though they'd never met, she'd probably heard a thing or two about him, and none of it likely to be good. "Nice to meet you, Billy. It's sweet of you to take care of him."

Really? Billy pursed his lips. "He'd do the same for me."

They didn't say much more, Joyce making the odd comment as she wiped away the black goop and dabbed at the cuts on Steve's face, Billy holding him close while she did so, watching the rise and fall of his chest start to even out under his hand as he calmed down. When Joyce was done, she went into the other room to call the chief and let him know he and Steve were accounted for. "You're not in trouble," she said, on seeing Billy tense up, "he's just got to know. Thank God the kids were all up with him and El this evening."

Once they were settled, she'd told them they were welcome to stay while Steve slept off the worst of the fucking strong painkillers she'd dug out of the bathroom cabinet, and gone to take a bath. Billy gave a lot of thought to whether he wanted to stay or not, before he realised he wouldn't be able to function if he left, would probably just spend all night worrying over Steve and go and do something stupid. So he stayed. He let Steve doze, curled up under a fucking ugly blanket, while he made himself as small as possible on the other end of the sofa and wished he had a cigarette.

"Billy?" Steve's croak pulled him out of his thoughts.

"Hey. Hey sweetheart, I'm here." He shuffled across to sit closer, careful not to jostle him too much.

"Hey big guy," he smiled up at him, big and soft, grabbing for Billy's hand and missing, pawing at his bloody shirt sleeve instead, "what... what are we doing here?"

"You got a little banged up when we were fighting those things," he said, taking pity on him and taking his hand, pressing his lips to the back of it. "You told me to bring you here, Mrs Byers helped patch you up a little."

"Oh. Shit."

"Yeah," Billy smiled at the wide-eyed confusion on his face. "Those painkillers got you pretty good, huh."

"Mm."

"It's okay. We can sleep it off here, and I'll take you home tomorrow."

"Come here, baby," Steve pulled Billy down by their linked hands so was squished up next to him along the length of the sofa, him under the blanket and Billy over.

"Fuck, careful there hot stuff," Billy grunted, "try not to move too much. I don't think my elbow in your ribs is gunna help 'em any."

"I'm fine, I'm great."

"Sure you are."

They lay in silence a little while, the house silent other than a clock ticking away above the mantelpiece, Billy wanting to talk but knowing Steve was in no fit state for it.

"You were gunna break up with me." Ah. Shit. Maybe a little more fit for it than he thought.

Billy froze, not sure what to say or do. Steve might have been doped up to high hell, but not enough that he'd forgotten what they were talking about before the dog things got to them.

"Please don't do that."

"Steve, baby - "

"No no no, shh," Steve clumsily put his fingers over Billy's lips. "We're not breaking up, you jerk."

"Alright. We're not."

"Good."

Steve feel back to sleep, and Billy tried to pull the blanket over the

both of them as Steve wrapped himself around him. He got a little drowsy too after a while, watching Steve curl into him, leg swung over Billy's and breathing hot and slow on his chest. He heard a car rumble outside, and figured it was just someone driving past on their way someplace else, until he remembered that the Byers' had a pretty long driveway and there was no way he could be hearing a car unless

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The younger Byers kid walked in through the door, small stack of notebooks and paper and whatever under his arm, mouth open in surprise and eyes gone wide as he took in the two older boys cuddled up on his couch.

"Uh... hey."

"Hey," the kid said quietly, still clutching at his papers, frozen to the spot. Proper little rabbit in the headlights. It'd be funny, if Billy and his doped up, clingy boyfriend weren't the figurative headlights. "Um. The chief dropped us all home... Where's my mom?"

"She's taking a bath."

"Okay." He swallowed, his eyes dropping to Steve and his cut up face, fingers curled tight in Billy's shirt, mouth pressed right up to the skin of his neck as he slept. "Is he okay?" No doubt the other little brats had filled him in about what had happened the last time Billy Hargrove was in his front room.

"Yeah, yeah he'll be fine. He just - " Billy wasn't sure how much he was allowed to say about what had happened to him and Steve that evening. Although given what he'd heard about the kid, the surprisingly chill reaction of his mom, and the fact that Henderson at least seemed to be in on it, it was possible he knew all about those fucked up things too. He decided to play it safe; he didn't want to get him all worked up, if it was nothing. "He had a little run in with some other kids from school. Nothing big. Your mom helped me patch him up."

The kid nodded, though it was pretty obvious he didn't believe him. Bless him for that, little runt. "The demodogs?"

Dumb fucking name, if you asked Billy. "Yeah. Henderson radioed, but - " *But I wouldn't let him leave.*

The kid nodded. "I know. I was with him."

"Right."

Steve jerked suddenly in his grip, making both Billy and Will jump and almost toppling himself right off the couch before Billy hauled him back up. "Billy?"

"Shh baby, I got you," he rubbed Steve's back, went to kiss the side of his head before he remembered their audience, pushed from Billy's mind with the sudden worry over Steve. "Oh crap," he rolled his eyes to mask the rapidly rising panic in his chest before giving the kid his best glare. "Look kid," he said, low and dangerous, "this can't get out, you got it? You tell a soul, and I - "

"It's cool."

"...What?"

"I - I think it's cool," the kid said again, quieter still, face gone all pink and blotchy, but meeting Billy's eye. Ah. Right.

"No one else can find out," Billy reiterated. "They do, and... well, I know where you live." Not that he could ever fucking hurt this startled rabbit of a kid, or that his little friends would let him, but a little fear wouldn't hurt.

"I won't tell," the kid said, smile threatening to break at the corners of his mouth, like he knew it was the emptiest fucking threat Billy'd ever delivered, "promise."

"Yeah well, you'd better not," Billy muttered darkly, curled himself closer around Steve.

"It's..." the kid hesitated, eyes darting to the floor like he was working up the courage to say something, "it's sweet of you. To look after him like that."

"Fuck, not you too," Billy spoke into the blanket.

"What?"

"Nothin'."

"I'm gunna go say goodnight to my mom now. She'll be worried, after this evening."

Billy raised his head again to nod. "Knock yourself out, short stuff."

"G'night," the kid smiled for real that time, and trotted off down the hall.

"Whatever," Billy murmured to his retreating back, made sure Steve's neck wasn't at a weird angle or he'd have a killer of a backache in the morning, and tried to get some sleep on the Byers' ratty couch.

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The morning was cold and bright, and Billy knew he had to get home soon or he'd be in the shit, but he didn't want to leave just yet. Steve hadn't been able to bear the stuffiness of being inside any longer, so the two of them were sitting on the Byers' front porch, each with a cup of coffee handed to them by Mrs Byers with a wordless smile before she'd gone back inside.

Billy was just sitting, waiting for Steve to speak. He was hunched over where he sat, meds worn off enough for his ribs to start giving him trouble. The bruise was blooming nicely now high across his cheek, the shallow cuts Mrs Byers had patched up looking sore but clean, split lip a little swollen. One of them always seemed to have a busted face, one way or another. So he sat, and waited, tucking his cold fingers under his jacket, watching Steve's breath visibly puff over the steaming cup of coffee.

And he knew about Steve's parents, had got a good laugh out of it to start with even, because poor little rich boy's absent parents were nothing compared to Billy's downright fucking bastard of a father. He knew about the missed birthdays and stilted Christmases and disappointed reactions to his report cards. Knew how tricky he could find school, and the grisly details of how things had ended with Wheeler. After all the shit he'd seen last night, he suspected all that was just the tip of the iceberg. And he'd sure as shit be asking Steve

more about that as soon as he looked like he'd be able to give a decent answer.

"You've probably got some questions, huh?" said Steve at last, as though he'd heard Billy's thoughts.

"I got a few, yeah."

"Right. And I'm guessing you won't let me just pretend none of this happened?"

"No fucking chance, Harrington."

"Yeah," Steve nodded. "I thought you might say that. Full disclosure, I never wanted you to have to deal with this too. But before we get going on that, I just - I've got one question for you first, if that's okay."

"Shoot."

"Are you gunna stick around?"

"What?"

Steve breathed out, long and hard, raised his coffee to his mouth then lowered it again. "You were going to dump me yesterday."

"...Yeah."

"You still want to?"

"No. I never wanted to."

"Alright. Then don't fucking do that to me again. I can't deal with this," he gestured back towards the house, "and you saying shit like that if you don't mean it. You were right, we probably do have a lot we've gotta talk about. But just like, do me favour, and say what you actually feel next time?"

Billy's throat was dry. He drank some coffee. "I can try."

"Okay," Steve said, "that's good. And look, I'm not sure how much of

all this I can talk about today, but there's one thing I want to say, right now."

"Spit it out, Harrington."

"I - sleep better, with you there?" he rubbed the back of his head, looked a little apologetic. "I do better at school, with your help. My house doesn't feel so fucking unbearably empty with you in it. And I don't know how healthy any of that shit is, really. But I do know that having you around has made me happier than I have been for a while."

"I - " Billy was struck dumb. Because all that time he'd spent worrying about how much he needed Steve and how much that scared him, he hadn't really considered that Steve might have needed him too. "Yeah. Me too."

Steve let his hand rest, palm up, on the rail in front of them. Billy stared at it. "You want to me to hold your hand?"

"Damn fucking right I do."

"Seriously?"

"Yes, seriously. I nearly got eaten by a fucking demodog, okay. *Again*. Humour me." Steve raised his eyebrow, looked expectantly from Billy and his open hand.

"Fine, Jesus," Billy huffed and slipped his fingers in between Steve's. His hand was hot where he'd been holding the coffee mug.

"Happy now?"

"Actually, yeah."

They drank their coffee mostly in silence, Steve gently squeezing Billy's hand every now and then, as the sun got higher and the morning chill burnt off. And yeah okay, maybe Billy could handle being called sweet every once in a while. Because if his boy needed some sweetness to counter all the shit he'd had to wade through, then Billy was more than happy to give it to him, if he could.

"Wait," he said, as a thought suddenly occurred to him, "nearly got eaten *again*?"

"Yeah about that..." Steve winced into his empty mug. "So it started when Will Byers went missing."

Author's Note:

**Said woman take it slow and things will be just
fine**

You and I'll just use a little patience,

**Said sugar take the time 'cause the lights are
shining bright**

You and I've got what it takes to make it.

Lyrics from Guns N Roses' Patience.

This is a goddamn trainwreck, but I had fun.